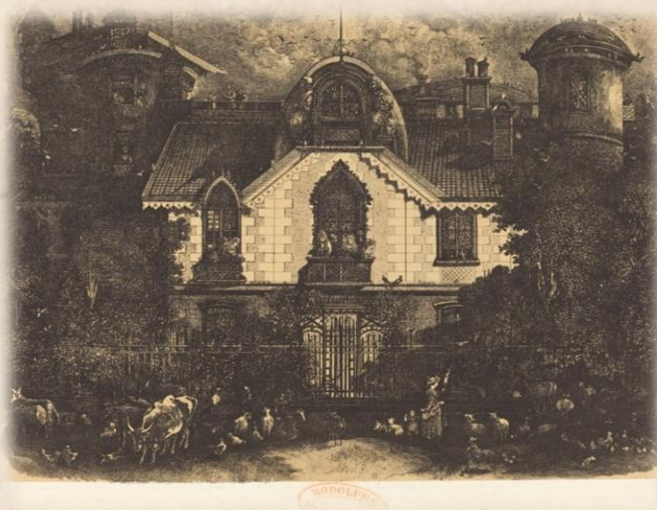


Another Death, Another House

A revised introductory scenario for Curse of Strahd, designed specifically for new players

A 2-3 hour adventure for 1st level characters, that gets them to 3rd level.



by Thomas Kolar



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Why Another?

Death House is a very good level 1 haunted house. However, I do not believe it to be a good introduction *for players who have never played D&D before*. It's highly lethal, and if you've spent more than an hour designing a character for the first time, excited to play in a long running gothic adventure campaign, it can be quite discouraging to die on your third dice roll ever. I myself was playing Death House with a group of mostly new players, and we got TPK'd one hour into the session. It was not a great introduction to the hobby for those new players. A year later, I was running Curse of Strahd with four other players, only one of whom had ever played before. I rewrote Death House to be less deadly and also to be more specifically structured to teach the new players the system. They had a good time, and we're all still happily playing through Curse a year and a half later. I want to share that new adventure with you, especially if you're running this for a new player group. Also, even if you're not planning to run Curse of Strahd, I think this is still a good introductory level 1 spooky haunted house adventure (just adjust the milestone leveling if you like). Happy Gaming!

You need the Death House adventure from Curse of Strahd to use this, for the map and room descriptions. If you don't have Curse of Strahd, no problem! Wizards of the Coast released the adventure online for free here:

<https://media.wizards.com/2016/downloads/DND/Curse%20of%20Strahd%20Introductory%20Adventure.pdf>

Grab it, read it, and enjoy!

Another Death

Gustav and Elizabeth Durst, along with their daughter Rosevalda, lived for many years the comparatively comfortable lives of Barovian nobility. The birth of their second child, Thornboldt, left Elizabeth weak and exhausted. Gustav began looking for a new ladies' maid to care for her. Then, Cousin Rebecca came to help. Rebecca was a member of a distant branch of the Durst family that had fallen into impoverishment and dissolution. Gustav saw a chance to aid a relative and to provide for Elizabeth's needs at the same time. Rebecca impressed Gustav with her diligence, kindness and attentive care of Elizabeth. Unbeknownst to Gustav, however, Rebecca was also an apprentice witch, with dark ambitions to restore her fortune and place in society. She slowly poisoned Elizabeth while charming her way into Gustav's heart. Mere months after Elizabeth's death, Gustav married Rebecca. She quickly took to her new role as lady of the house, hosting lavish parties, spending freely, and hoping for a child with Gustav to cement her new position in noble society. She became a cold, strict stepmother to the other children. A year later, she finally gave birth to baby Walter. In Walter, Rebecca experienced a joy and fierce devotion beyond any she had ever known, but Walter was a pale, sickly baby feebly clinging to life. In desperation, she contacted the dread Lord Strahd. Amused by her arrogance and her petty little life, Strahd gave her a ritual that would stop time at the moment of Walter's last breath, uniting them together forever. This ritual required a terrible sacrifice to power the stopping of time. As Walter worsened, Rebecca hosted a final ball. She poisoned everyone—guest and servants. She set the house on fire and waited, holding Walter as he died. But as the roof collapsed from the flame, and the smoke cleared, Durst house stood intact, empty and dark. It has stood thus for a hundred years. In Barovia, there are stories of people who ventured too close to Durst house at night and saw strange lights and shadows dancing, heard music and voices. Those who go into the house never come out, their spirits trapped as fuel for the curse, another ghost of Death House.

A Note on Descriptive Text

I do not use read aloud boxes, and I feel strange writing them (is that too many adjectives?) I am going to write scenes as I would present them to my own PCs, as descriptions of the events, *in italics*. Please feel free to use them as read-alouds, embellish them, or otherwise make them your own.

Another House

In this version of the adventure, the players are brought to Death House in a similar manner to the core Curse of Strahd adventure. The ghosts of Rose and Thorn beg them to help (their real ghosts, not projections of the house). They seek to be put to rest, their bodies finally given a proper burial in the family crypt. This will break the curse, freeing the other spirits and ending Death House (also allowing the Players to escape). The curse can also be broken by defeating the Specter of Rebecca Durst.



The layout, description, and contents of each room are the same as the original adventure script (unless specifically noted).

Rose and Thorn meet the players in the lobby and keep repeating variations of “we can’t sleep. Please, it’s so loud, we’re so tired, please help us rest.”

Players can roll Wisdom (Perception) DC 15 or Intelligence (Investigation or History) DC 10 to tell that their clothes are of fine material and manufacture, but about a century out of date.

When the players enter the house, it is empty but blazing with lights, and decorations, empty glasses, plates, and other evidence of a grand celebration are scattered around. They hear the sound of distant conversation, music, and laughter. The front doors shut, magically sealed behind them.

Exploring the House

When I’ve run this, the groups have always thoroughly explored each floor in order, but that isn’t true for everyone. When they find Rose and Thorn’s tombs, those ghosts should appear and explain they need to be put to rest to break the curse.

If the PCs head straight upstairs they should have the combat with the **Sets of Armor** on the second floor. Be sure to describe the portrait changing in order to clue them in to attacking it, and they can’t advance to the third floor until they fight the **Haunted Portrait**.

I believe that a lot of the enjoyment of a ghost story is learning the story, figuring out the past that defines the ghosts. In order to get the basics of the story, the PCs need to find the **Coven Letters** (detailed in **The Storage Room: Area 18**) and the **Strahd Letter**. I’m going to suggest several different locations for those items, so your players can find them whatever order they explore or whatever rooms they do or do not explore. I suggest have them find the **Coven Letters** first, and the **Strahd Letter** second if you don’t want them to find both at once.

First Floor

The Players will encounter the ghosts, begin to learn the story of the cursed house that traps them, and have their first combat.

The Main Hall (area 2A) Hanging above the **Third Floor Balcony** (area 11), the PCs see a portrait of the original Durst family—Gustav, Elizabeth, and the two children—looking solemnly at them. The second time they enter the hallway, the portrait has changed. The original wife has been replaced by a younger woman holding a baby, with a triumphant smile on her face. The third time they enter, the portrait is of the younger woman alone, smirking at them.

This **Haunted Portrait** is a modified **Guardian Portrait**, a manifestation of Rebecca's ghost. It is also a boss fight for the first section of the game when they reach the third floor, to mark the first level milestone. The Haunted Portrait can use her spells anywhere in the house. The normal place to fight the Portrait is when they reach the third floor, but it can "possess" any painting in the house so you can move the "boss fight" to wherever you like/your PCs are focusing their attention.

A Crown of Flames on Their Head

Crown of Madness fits the theme and atmosphere, but being forced to attack other PC's isn't very fun (in my opinion). A less frustrating possibility is to modify the spell to let her try to force the PCs to injure themselves (walk off the balcony, etc) and let the other PCs try to stop them until they made their wisdom save. If you want to do the normal possession effect, another less frustrating modification is allowing the rest of the party to help the possessed PC by giving "snap out of it! You don't want to do this! You're still in there!" Talk each turn, making a Charisma (Persuasion) check DC 12, success allowing the possessed PC to reroll their Wisdom saving throw with *Advantage*.

The PCs can go into the **Dining Room** (area 5), or into the **Den** (area 3). Either of these is probably going to

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be their first combat. If these are first time players, this is an excellent opportunity to organically introduce some of the combat rules as well as encourage creative thinking and use of the environment.

Den of Wolves (area 3). *The lamps are lit, and the fire is blazing. When the players interact with the room (open the drawers, take the crossbow, etc), the doors slam shut and the lights go out. Players can*



relight the candelabrum or the fire. If they do not, the fire relights a moment later. When the room is relit, the players with the highest passive Perception notice the taxidermy wolves are gone, immediately followed by growls as the wolves circle them.

Taxidermy Wolves: same as **Wolves**, but *Vulnerable* to fire. Players can make an Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) DC 12 check to realize taxidermy animals are flammable, or a Wisdom (Perception/Insight) DC 10 check to notice the **Taxidermy Wolves** are shying away from the fireplace. They can throw candles at the **Taxidermy Wolves**, or try to force them into the fireplace. A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence

Death in the House

PC death is a topic with a wide range of opinions, but I would argue that in this specific situation (new players who made PCs for a long running game) a little bit of plot armor is justified. However, I also understand that the consequences of loss need to be meaningful, especially for setting the tone of a Ravenloft-set campaign. When a PC died in my version, their body dissolved into mist (no lugging corpses around). For the PC, everything faded to black, and then they woke up as a ghost. They were in a shadowy, phantasmal version of the room (the den) looking at the rest of the party. They tried to call them, but the rest of the party couldn't hear them. Rose and Thorn appeared, and explained that PC's spirit was trapped in the house. The character been fully absorbed by the curse, and if they broke the curse in 24 hours, they'd be restored to life. Rose and Thorn showed the PC how to focus their will to communicate with the living and move objects (Wisdom or Charisma save DC 10 to appear to the living party for 10 minutes, variable DC to move things- DC 12 to throw or push something with 1d4+Str damage, DC 14 to throw for 1d6+Str damage, etc)). Rose and Thorn then had to hide as their stepmother was looking for them. If you do this, here's my rules for Ghost PCs:

Their HP is restored to full.

They interact normally with denizens of the house: skeletons, Rebecca's Specter, etc.

The Ghost PC does normal physical damage and takes normal physical damage from enemies (no resistances on either side). If they get to 0 hp, they fade away. It's up to you if they're restored to life after that at the end of the adventure.

There are many benefits to the ghost PC, especially the ability to do normal physical damage to Rebecca's Specter. However, a ghost PC has Disadvantage on rolls to resist Rebecca's Spellcasting (Portrait or Specter).

After they end the curse and escape the house, the ghost PC is restored to life. They then make a Wisdom save DC 12. If they fail, they get an Indefinite Madness from the Madness table in the DMG.

(Investigation) when searching the room reveals that trap door, although it is still mystically sealed.

Consider adjusting the number of **Taxidermy Wolves** to be two if you have a group of two PCs, and up to four if you have five or six PCs.

This is a good place to teach your players about some of the combat rules like being knocked prone, and *Advantage* (using the wolves *pack tactics* ability). Encourage them to make use of the furniture in the room for positioning and cover. This can be a hard fight if the wolves roll decently, and the aftermath could be a chance to encourage the players to use a short rest and teach them to use hit die.

The Dining Room (area 5). *When they enter, they see a spectral dinner party. Phantom servants move around serving phantom party guests who are milling around the table. The party chatter sounds distorted, underwater. The woman at the head of the table, the same as the woman in the painting, rises. The guests silence, and she raises her glass. "Midnight! And let us toast Durst House! May she stand eternal!" The guests and servants down their drinks, and collapse.*



At this point, the **Haunted Portrait** uses one of her "Hypnotic Pattern" spells. Those PCs that fail their Wisdom save (DC 12) stand rigid, and begin shuffling toward the center of the room. Any non-hypnotized

PCs notice a sword from a set of two on the wall floats over and begins cutting the rope on the chandelier. They can try to restrain the hypnotized PCs with opposed Strength (Athletics) checks.

The un hypnotized PCs can also talk to the hypnotized PCs to try to snap them out of it, Charisma (Persuasion) DC 12. If their talk succeeds, the hypnotized PC may make another Wisdom saving throw DC 12, with *Advantage* to throw off the effect. After 2 rounds, unrestrained PCs reach the center of the room; and the chandelier drops, doing 1d6+1 (4) bludgeoning damage. The “Hypnotic Pattern” spell is released. The portrait of the landscape has now become a copy of the portrait of Rebecca from the main hall, smirking at the PCs. A Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) DC 10 check reveals arcane glyphs chalked under the seat at the head of the table. A Intelligence (Arcana) DC 12 check reveals those glyphs are Necromancy, and somewhat resemble a “Speak with Dead” or “Raise Dead” spell.

If all the PCs make their initial Wisdom save vs the Hypnotic Pattern, one or two **Flying Swords** come from a decorative plaque on the wall and attack them. You can also use this combat after the chandelier falls. Be careful if you’ve done the “Den of Wolves” encounter already, though, especially if they didn’t rest or heal. Both combats in a row here can be lethal.

This can also be a chance to encourage clever use of the environment in the combat, like grabbing a chair and using it to trap one of the flying swords as it stabbed down, or to dive under the table for protection. When the encounter ends, the PCs see the spirit of Gustav Durst for one moment, clutching his throat, reaching toward them with a pleading look.

After this encounter, the House has changed. The house and the furniture are now dark, filthy, and decayed. Rose and Thorn stand there, looking around nervously. They tell the PCs that they cannot talk long as “she knows when we’re out of our room. She’ll be looking for us soon.” They explain their death (Rose continually corrects Thorn when he refers to Rebecca as their mother), and they cannot leave or rest until the spell is broken, and they can sleep.

The Kitchen and Pantry (area 4). In the Pantry (area 4B) is a trapdoor that opens into the Cellar. An Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check DC 12 reveals it under some bags in a corner of the room. It is magically sealed until the PCs find the children’s bodies, just like the trapdoor in (area 3) Den of wolves.



Second Floor

The Players will encounter more ghosts, learn more about the house, and find the key to the **Children’s Room** (area 20).

Most of this floor is the same. When they reach the **Upper Hall** (area 6), the four sets of armor come to life and attack them. Use the stats for **Skeletons**, but remove the shortbow attack. If the PCs went straight up the stairs, this is their first combat. Emphasize how clunky and mechanical the armor sets’ movements are, and how single minded they are, to encourage player cleverness and teamwork in outwitting them. When they finish this combat, the central portrait of Rebecca is now glaring at them in fury. Consider adjusting the number of **Sets of Armor** to be two if you have a group of two PCs, three for groups of three or four PCs, and four if you have five or six PCs.

The Library (area 8) still opens to the **Secret Room** (area 9), but it is no longer has occult books. The treasure is still there, along with the deed to the Windmill. The **Strahd Letter** is now in the **Master Suite** (area 12), or behind the **Haunted Portrait** on the **3rd Floor Balcony** (area 11) or Rebecca's Work table in the **Attic** (area 18)

There are not many scripted encounters on the second floor other than **the Broom of Animated Attack** (and that's conditional on them exploring the **Storage Room** (area 14)). If you want to add more Encounters to the second or third floor, here are six random Encounters you can use, choosing or rolling a d6. Each one is designed to be a potential hazard, but also reward the PCs (of course, you're free to cut the reward part if you want the adventure to be harder or more dangerous-feeling). Some will affect the group, but most are individual. Choose a PC to trigger it or have all of them roll Encounter appropriate saves and target the PC with the lowest roll.

Third Floor

The PCs will confront the **Haunted Painting** and find more information about the Curse.

The Balcony (area 11). The **Animated Armor** is not here. Instead, they can face the **Haunted Portrait**. It will use any remaining "Crown of Madness" spells to try to get them to walk off the balcony (2d6 bludgeoning damage). It uses its "Hypnotic Pattern" spells to stop them from attacking, and its Telekinesis to throw objects at them (1d6 +1 bludgeoning damage). When they defeat it, **Rebecca's Specter** appears, screams in rage [DC 12 Dexterity (Athletics) save to not be knocked prone], and vanishes. The PC's should level up on winning this encounter. The key to the **Children's' Room** (area 20), is in a small niche revealed behind the slashed painting. You can also have the PCs find **the Strahd Letter** or the **Coven Letters** in the niche. Putting the letters in the niche removes some of the reward and pacing of exploration the whole house, but guarantees they PCs will find the ghost story details. The PCs cannot proceed to the third floor until they've defeated the **Haunted Portrait**. It will

Death House Encounter Table

1. *The Floor Cracks Under Your Feet.* The targeted PC makes a Dexterity Save (DC 12). On a failed save, the floor crumbles under their feet, and they become Grappled. They or another PC may spend 1 action to remove the trapped foot from the hole. A **swarm of rats** pours out and attacks the PCs. The PC removing the trapped foot notices a metallic glint under the floorboard, a **+1 dagger**. Any other times, the glint is a sack of coins with 50 gold.
2. *A Ghostly Servant Passes Through You.* The PC passed through has a flash of the servant's memory of hiding in a corner and sneaking a glass of the expensive wine, then collapsing to the floor, dead. This PC makes a Constitution Save (DC 12) as they disentangle their memories from the ghost. On a failed save, they take 1d4 +1 necrotic damage. That PC now knows one useful fact about the layout of the house. They can ask you a question about the house or you can reveal it at a critical moment (your choice).
3. *Suddenly, You See the House Burning.* The targeted PC makes a Wisdom Save (DC 12) to see through the illusion. On a failure, they take 1d4+1 fire damage before the illusion fades. That PC now knows some detail about the house's burning, giving them *Advantage* on a roll of their choice in **The Final Escape** encounter.
4. *A Crown of Flames Appears Above Your Head.* Rebecca's Haunted Portrait uses one of its "Crown of Madness" spells to try to force the targeted PC to throw themselves off the balcony (2d6 bludgeoning damage).
5. *A Spectral Woman Appears, Lunging at You.* Rebecca's Specter attacks the targeted PC for one round. Track any HP damage done to the Specter for future fights. It disappears if reduced to ½ or less of the hp it started with.
6. *Well Dressed Skeletons Round the Corner, Dancing Toward You.* A number of *Skeletal Guests* equal to the number of PCs, wearing tattered finery, sway and dance toward the PCs. The skeletons do not have any weapons; they instead target a PC to "dance" with, a +2 grapple attack. If the skeleton successfully starts a turn grappling a PC, they burst into flames, doing 1d6 fire damage to the PC every turn that PC is Grappled. When defeated, they crumble into piles of bones and clothes. Each Skeleton has jewelry or other trinkets worth 30 gold.

exhaust all its spells to stop them, and if they still haven't attacked it, then the stairs will loop down with no way to exit to (or from) the third floor balcony. Destroying the painting puts the stairs back right.

The Master Suite (Area 12) When the PCs enter, they see a momentary image of Gustav Durst's spirit pointing toward the vanity. The vanity has a concealed panel [DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check]. Inside, you can have the PCs find **the Strahd Letter** or the **Coven Letters**, as well as the scorched, crumpled pages of the curse ritual (if not already found in the **Storage Room**: area 18). A DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the spell involves holding a spirit in place at the moment of death, and is powered by sacrificing scores of people, their ghosts acting to hold a small area in a kind of pocket reality. If any of the ghosts can be put to rest, it will pop the time containment field and end the curse. This knowledge of the curse will also allow the Players to have *Advantage* in a single magical attack made against **Rebecca's Specter**. The Strahd letter triggers access to the **Secret Stair** (area 21).



The Nursemaid's Suite (area 15) is now simply the **Nursery**. The crib rests on top of a rug, and if the PCs lift the rug they will find elaborate arcane symbols chalked under it, centering on the crib with an Intelligence (Investigation) roll DC 10. They cannot erase the glyphs until the curse is broken. If they go inside, they hear wheezing, shallow breathing coming from the wrapped bundle in the crib. As they enter, the wrapped bundle begins fussing. They must all make a DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check to not wake the baby and continue exploring the room. If

anyone fails, the noise causes the bundle to begin crying in a reedy whine. **Rebecca's Specter** appears, enraged that they woke the baby and fights them for 3 rounds or until it loses half of its current hit points before departing with a shriek. **Rebecca's Specter** is a normal **Specter**, except give her any of the Haunted Portrait's unused spells. Track any damage done to **Rebecca's Specter** for future fights.

The Attic

The PCs will find Rose and Thorn's bodies, and the passage down to the crypt if they haven't yet. If you want another combat encounter (say the players skipped the third floor or ignored the storage room) you can move the **Broom of Animated Attack** from the third floor **Storage Room** (Area 14) to one of the **Spare Bedrooms** (Area 17 or 19). When they enter this floor, the spirit of Gustav Durst appears in the hall, reaching toward the children's room with a look of longing. He says "Help them" and vanishes.

The Storage Room (area 18). There is no dead body, and no encounter with a **Specter**. A DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) and the PCs will notice one of the covered tables in the corner has arcane glyphs chalked on the floor. Moving the sheet reveals a battered desk with a few occult books (choose 3 cantrips the PCs could copy), occult supplies; spell components (too old to use except for those needed for the chosen cantrips), a variety of poison and alchemical equipment. In one of the drawers are two *Potions of Healing*. This is Rebecca's worktable. If they have not found the **Coven Letters**, the PCs can search the desk to find a series of letters from Rebecca's mother and the rest of her coven instructing Rebecca on how best to poison Elizabeth and instructions for Charm potions to use on Gustav. The Final letter, unsent, is a desperate plea from Rebecca for a spell to save her dying infant son. If the PCs read these letters, the PCs have *Advantage* on any attempts to taunt or bait Rebecca's Specter. This is another potential location for the **Strahd Letter**, as well as the scorched, crumpled pages of the curse ritual (if not already found in the **Master Suite**: area 12). If they find the curse ritual here, a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the spell involves holding a spirit in place at the moment of death, and is powered by sacrificing

scores of people, their ghosts acting to hold a small area in a kind of pocket reality. If any of those ghosts can be put to rest, it will pop the time containment field and end the curse. This knowledge of the curse will also allow the Players to have *Advantage* in a single magical attack made against **Rebecca's Specter**. The Strahd letter triggers access to the **Secret Stair** (area 21).



The Children's Room (area 20). The mummified bodies of the children lie on the bed, poisoned. The ghosts of the two children appear, and explain that they cannot sleep, none of the dead can sleep, until they are put to rest. If the PCs haven't found the entrance to the cellar/crypt, Rose's ghost gestures to the dollhouse, revealing the **Secret Stair** (area 21) and triggering access to that stair, as well as magically unsealing the trapdoors in **Den of Wolves** (area 3) and the **Cellar** (area 4).

A Whole Realm of Death

The coven letters are an excellent way to further connect Death House to the rest of Curse of Strahd (other than introducing Strahd). Simply have one or more of the letters be from the coven leader, and have that be an undead or otherwise long lived NPC your party might encounter later, giving them a pre-existing connection to that NPC as well as some backstory for that NPC. Patrina Velikovna is an obvious choice, or one of the vampire spawn from the Castle.

The Cellar and the Crypt

The PCs will hopefully place Rose and Thorn's bodies in their tombs, breaking the curse and triggering **The Final Confrontation** with **Rebecca's Specter** and **The Final Escape** from Death House.

This is the biggest change to the house layout, as the whole underground cult complex is gone.

In this version, the **Cellar** is just Area 22, 23, and 24. Area 24 is the **Storage Cellar**, accessible from the **Den** (area 3) and the **Secret Stair** (area 21). See *Appendix A: New Cellar and Crypt Map*.

Area 23 is the **Crypt**, with two empty tombs prepared and labeled for Rose and Thorn. If they give Rose and Thorn a proper burial, describe the ghosts of Rose and Thorn saying final words of thanks to the PCs before closing their eyes and fading away, finally at peace. If the PCs have become attached to them and feel proud of themselves, I would give them *Inspiration* for this success (and as prep for the final challenges).

The Final Confrontation

Rebecca's Specter will appear a moment later, screaming at them as the house shakes and the smell of smoke begins to drift down the cellar (or wherever this happens). She will roar with rage at the PCs "I won't let you take him from me! I won't lose him! I killed all of them and I'll kill you too. Your souls will be more thread to bind us together!"

The **Specter** should still be down any hit points lost in previous encounters, and have any unused spells from the painting. If you use the optional rules for ghost PCs, allow those PCs to make regular physical attacks; however, they're still vulnerable to her life drain, and have *Disadvantage* against her magic. You should reward the PCs if they try to use the knowledge they've discovered about her to taunt or distract her by giving them *Advantage* or giving Rebecca *Disadvantage*.

If the Combat is too easy- you could have her life drain also heal her the drained HP, a number of times equal to the number of living PCs.

Alternatively (or concurrently) you could have *Rebecca's Specter* use an action to summon a CL or party-size appropriate number of *Skeletal Guests*, to spread out the PCs' actions.

If the Combat is too hard, and you're worried about everyone dying, the ghosts of Gustav and Elizabeth appear and attack Rebecca. They restore some of the hit points and lost strength from her life drain and restrain her for a round, urging the PCs to finish her off.

You don't **need** to do this combat if you don't think your players would enjoy it, you're running out of time, you're worried any combat would be a total massacre, etc. You can trigger **The Final Escape** encounter on breaking the curse. However, if your players have gotten attached to hating Rebecca and wanting to defeat her, make sure to give them some catharsis.

You could do a combat where **Rebecca's Specter** has reduced hit points to make it easier. If you want to give a cathartic defeat but avoid/skip any combat entirely, I suggest the following scene.

*As Rose and Thorn fade into peaceful rest, **Rebecca's Specter** appears, screaming in rage. The PCs feel her dark power wash over them, and a deep voice bellows "enough!" She wheels in confusion, and behind her is the ghost of Gustav. Other ghosts- guests, servants, appear one by one behind him. "It's over now, Rebecca." He lunges at her, the other ghosts following behind in a writhing spectral mass. The house begins to shake and the PCs hear Gustav's voice. "Thank you. Now, Run! Escape, before it's too late!" Then trigger **The Final Escape** encounter.*

Either way, any ghostly PCs come back to life for **The Final Escape**.



Alternative Triggers for The Final Escape

But what if your PCs totally ignore the story of breaking the curse by putting Rose and Thorn to rest in the crypt? They can't leave the house until they break the curse, and that will trigger some variation of **The Final Escape** encounter. Here are a couple options they might try, but I encourage you to allow any ideas that makes sense in the context of the story.

1. We just want to fight Rebecca.

Allow them to go to someplace important to Rebecca in the story (i.e. the **Nursery**, the **Master Suite**, the **Dining Room**) and taunt her in order to trigger a confrontation. Normally this would be a Charisma (Persuasion or Intimation) check DC 18 (Rebecca has no reason to try to fight them directly), but lower the DC to 15 if they've researched her and especially if they found the work table and coven letters in the **Storage Room** (area 18), which they can use to make the taunts or threats more pressing. A success triggers **The Final Confrontation**.

2. We want to give Walter a proper burial.

Returning to the **Nursery** (area 15), they'll find the ghost of Walter wrapped in a blanket. They can take him to crypt and either prepare a grave or lay him in the grave prepared for Gustav Durst. If they want to bury Walter but have no idea where, you can have the spirit of Gustav Durst flicker into view, giving them the clue to take him to the crypt, telling the PCs "bring him to me. Bring me my son. Please." Either way, burying Walter will also trigger **The Final Confrontation**.

3. We want to break the curse.

Step A: Researching the curse.

If the PCs find the curse spell pages in the vanity within the **Master Suite** (area 12) or the **Storage Room** (area 18), they can make a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check to figure out how to magically break the curse. If they fail, tell them they need more information about the spell. If they have previously found the coven letters, the DC for the Intelligence (Arcana) check is 13 (and they can make a second attempt if they previously failed). If they succeed in

either of their first two Intelligence (Arcana) checks, the countercurse ritual will take 3 sequential rounds.

If they fail a second check, they can examine, with a Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) DC 12, Rebecca's Work Table in the **Storage Room** (area 18) or the glyphs hidden under the rug in the **Nursery** (area 15) and if they succeed in either examination they can make a third Intelligence (Arcana) check DC 10. If they succeed in this third check they can attempt the ritual, but it will take 4 rounds. If they fail in this check, they trigger **The Final Confrontation**.

Step B: Performing the countercurse ritual.

If they succeed at any of the three Intelligence (Arcana) checks, they need to set up a ritual circle on a table over the glyphs hidden under the rug on the floor of the Nursery. The ritual takes 3-4 successful sequential rounds (or 6 total successful rounds). The ritual begins with the PC primarily performing the ritual, the PC who made the successful Intelligence (Arcana) roll, going automatically in the first turn in Initiative Order. The other PCs (and Rebecca's Specter) roll Initiative. The Ritual Performing PC needs to maintain Concentration for those 3-4 sequential rounds or for 6 total rounds. If they succeed, the curse is broken.

In the first round, on her Initiative turn Rebecca sends 1-3 **Sets of Armor** (use skeletons, but remove the shortbow attack) into the room to attack the PCs, which focus on attacking the Ritual Performing PC (preferably a **Set of Armor** for each PC minus one). When all the sets or armor are defeated, their swords rise up and continue fighting (1-3 **Flying Swords**).

If an enemy hits the Ritual Casting PC, that PC must make a DC 12 Wisdom save to maintain concentration on the spell. If at any point the Ritual Casting PC fails one Wisdom check to maintain concentration, they may make another Wisdom save at DC 15 on their next Initiative turn to regain control of the spell. If they fail two, they must make an Intelligence (Arcana) check to restart the ritual. If they fail this check as well, an enraged **Rebecca's Specter** appears, triggering **The Final Confrontation**.

On the Ritual Casting PC's Initiative turn (the start of every round), one of the following challenges happen—you can choose or roll a d4. If the same one happens twice, the same thing happens and increase the Ritual Casting PC save roll for the challenge by +2 DC.

If they break the curse, **Rebecca's Specter** appears in flames, burning away. *The ghosts of the Durst family, the guests, and the servants appear, eyes closed, whispering "thank you" as they fade.* This triggers **The Final Escape**.



Countercurse Ritual Challenge Table

1. *Objects Fly Across the Room Toward You.* The Ritual Casting PC must make a Dexterity save, DC 12 to dodge the objects. Any other PC may use their turn (they miss their Initiative that turn) to make the same roll and if the other PC succeeds (blocking and knocking away the objects); the Ritual Casting PC makes the Dexterity (Acrobatics) roll with *Advantage*. If the Ritual Casting PC fails their Dexterity (Acrobatics) roll, they must make a DC 12 Wisdom save to maintain concentration.

2. *The Table Shakes, Trying to Tip Over.* The Ritual Casting PC must make a Strength save, DC 12, to hold the table steady. Any other PC may use their turn (they miss their Initiative turn) to make the same roll and if the other PC succeeds (helping the Ritual Casting PC hold the table steady), the Ritual Casting PC makes the Strength (Athletics) check with *Advantage*. If the Ritual Casting PC fails their Athletics (Strength) check, they must make a DC 12 Wisdom save to maintain concentration.

3. *You Are Surrounded by Flame.* The Ritual Casting PC sees flames spring up around them, and feels scorching heat around their body. The other PCs see nothing (the flame is illusory). The Ritual Casting PC must make Intelligence save, DC 12 to convince themselves the flame is illusion, and disbelieve it away. Any other PC may use their turn (they miss their Initiative turn) to make a Charisma (Persuasion) or Nature (Intelligence) roll DC 12 to help persuade the Ritual Casting PC that the flame is an illusion. If they succeed, The Ritual Casting PC makes their Intelligence save with *Advantage*. If the Ritual Casting PC fails their Intelligence save, they must make a DC 12 Wisdom save to maintain concentration.

4. *A Spectral Woman Appears, Lunging Toward You.* **Rebecca's Specter** appears for a moment, stretching out her arm toward the Ritual Casting PC in order to use her life drain attack on them vs their normal AC. Any other PC in proximity may use their turn (they miss their Initiative turn) to jump in front of Rebecca's hand and take the attack instead. **Rebecca's Specter** disappears after this attack is resolved.



If your players don't escape, and you don't want to kill them (especially new players), the burning house collapses on them. They then wake up in the charred rubble with 1/3 of their hit points and a number of levels of exhaustion equal to their failed saves in the escape challenge (maximum 5). If they level up now they'll be at full hp (or not, you're the DM), but keep the levels of exhaustion. When the PCs come to, they are lying in charred rubble a century old.

I hope everyone had fun!



The Final Escape

If you want the party to have an easier time of **The Final Escape**, you can have them advance to level 3 after they put the ghosts to rest/defeat Rebecca/break the curse. If not, they should advance to level 3 after they escape.

The house is burning, its long temporal stasis finally ended. If you want a very challenging, kind of bonkers escape, then feel free to use the "**The Cult is Denied**" ending from the original adventure.

Otherwise, you can run the escape as a skill challenge, 8 successes to escape the house (for 4 PCs). For each failure, the PCs make DC 12 Constitution saves to resist the smoke and heat, taking 1d6+1 fire damage if they fail and half if they succeed.

If you want more combat (or as another fail condition for skill checks) you could have them confront the **Skeletal Guests** from option 6 on the Death House Encounter Table. I would do one skeleton for each failure they previously rolled in the Final Escape encounter as they are about to escape so that they have a final challenge.

Appendix A: New Cellar and Crypt Map



Appendix B: New Horrors of Death House

Haunted Portrait

Medium Construct, neutral evil

Armor Class 5 (natural armor)

Hit Points 14 (3d8)

Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	1 (-5)	10(+0)	14 (+2)	10(+0)	10(+0)

Condition Immunities Poison

Condition Immunities Charmed, Exhausted, Frightened, Grappled, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned, Prone, Restrained

Damage Vulnerabilities Fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, plus up to two other languages

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Antimagic Susceptibility. The portrait is incapacitated while in the area of an antimagic field. If targeted by dispel magic, the portrait must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or become unconscious for 1 minute.

Innate Spellcasting. The portrait's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12). The portrait can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day each: *counterspell*, *crown of madness*, *hypnotic pattern*, *telekinesis*

False Appearance. While the figure in the portrait remains motionless, the portrait is indistinguishable from a normal painting. The Portrait can "possess" any other painting in the house, and thus appear in any room.



Taxidermy Wolf

Medium Construct, neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 11 (2d8+2)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	15 (+2)	12(+1)	3 (-4)	12(+1)	6(-2)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4

Damage Vulnerabilities Fire

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages --

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell. The wolf has advantage on Wisdom/Perception checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Pack Tactics. Keen Hearing and Smell. The wolf has advantage on Wisdom/Perception checks that rely on hearing or smell. The wolf has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the wolf's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 11 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.



Skeletal Guest

Medium Undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 13 (2d8+4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	14 (+2)	15(+2)	6 (-2)	8(+1)	5(-3)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4

Damage Vulnerabilities Bludgeoning

Damage Immunities Fire, Poison

Condition Immunities Exhausted, Poisoned

Senses Darkvision 60 ft, Passive Perception 9

Languages Understands but does not speak languages it spoke in life.

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Actions

Shall We Dance? Grapple Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: Target is Grappled. At the start of the next turn in which the target is grappled, the Well Dressed Skeleton bursts into flames. Target takes 1d6 (3) fire damage for every turn they are grappled.



Rebecca's Specter

Medium Undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 22 (5d8+2)

Speed 0 ft. Fly 50 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1(-5)	14 (+2)	11(0)	10 (0)	10(0)	11(0)

Damage Resistance Acid, Cold, Fire, Lightning, Thunder, Bludgeoning, Piercing and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks

Damage Immunities Necrotic, Poison

Condition Immunities Charmed, Exhaustion, Grappled, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned, Prone, Restrained, Unconscious

Senses Darkvision 60 ft, Passive Perception 10

Languages Understands but does not speak languages it spoke in life.

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The Specter's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12). The Specter can innately cast the following *spells not already cast by the Haunted Portrait*, requiring no material components:

3/day each: *counterspell*, *crown of madness*, *hypnotic pattern*, *telekinesis*

Incorporeal Movement. The specter can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the specter has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom/Perception checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Life Drain. *Melee Spell Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the creature finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.



Appendix C: Revised Strahd Letter

My most pathetic servant,

You say you are cursed. Of this, I have no doubt. You begged for a child, and now he is lost. I am not a savior, and I will not save your son. Others might. If you call on the dark powers, yes, they can give you what you ask. However, they will ask a price, and it will be terrible. Will you pay it?

Your dread lord and master,

Strahd Von Zarovich

Acknowledgements:

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